FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Winnemucca District Drought Response Plan Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-W000-2013-0001-EA

I have reviewed the Winnemucca District Drought Response Plan Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-W000-2013-0001-EA, dated May 2013. After consideration of the environmental effects analyzed in the EA, I have determined that the proposed action including the design measures analyzed in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared per Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act.

This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

The Winnemucca District (WD) boundary encompasses approximately 11.1 million acres located in all of Humboldt and Pershing counties, and portions of Washoe, Lyon and Churchill counties in the northwest corner of Nevada. The WD manages 74.6% of these lands, or approximately 8.3 million acres of public lands, which is administered in two field offices, the Humboldt River Field Office (HRFO) and the Black Rock Field Office (BRFO) (see EA Map 1). The WD is located within the Central and Northern Basin and Range ecoregions defined by the Western Ecology Division of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (see Map 2). Drought is considered a recurring event within both ecoregions.

The Proposed Action allows for the rapid response to drought in order to alleviate the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely impacted by drought. The effects of drought are often times far-reaching, impacting the environment and economy of an area. The EA focuses primarily on the environmental impacts of drought. Specific impacts depend on drought severity, but often include:

- Increased number and severity of fires;
- Lack of forage and water;
- Decreased vigor and production of plants;
- Damage to plant community dynamics;
- Increased wind and water erosion of soils;
- Reduction and degradation of fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Increased mortality of wildlife, wild horses and burros and livestock

The EA analyzes a range of management drought response actions that may be implemented to mitigate the effects of drought and to address emergency situations. Emergency situations include, but are not limited to, wild horses and burros, vegetative

deficits for livestock and wildlife, water deprivation and mortality of livestock, wild horses and burros and wildlife, major soil erosion events, rangeland degradation, etc.

Intensity:

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse*.

The EA considers impacts that may be either beneficial or adverse through the analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action. These impacts are described in detail in Chapter 3 and 4 of the EA.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would help ensure the long-term health and sustainability of public lands managed by the WD by mitigating the effects of drought on rangeland resources.

Beneficial impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action include, but is not limited to, minimized potential for soil loss through erosion; reduced particulate matter in the air; reduced potential for degradation of wildlife habitat; increased resistance of rangelands to noxious weeds and non-native species invasion; maintenance of riparian and wetland vegetation; reduced potential for water contamination; long-term sustainability of livestock grazing on public lands; improved opportunities for dispersed recreation; protection of native vegetation; and sustained health of wild horses and burros.

Short-term adverse impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action could include temporary air particulate matter and vehicle emissions; increased utilization of forage around temporary water sources; increased potential for the spread of noxious weeds during wild horse and burro gathers; temporary financial impacts to grazing permittees; temporary reductions in recreational access to riparian and wetland areas; potential stress, injury or mortality to wild horses and burros resulting from gather activities; soil compaction around trap sites; changes in wild horse and burro population dynamics, age structure, sex, ratios and genetic diversity. Adverse impacts associated with wild horse and burro management activities, as well as other authorized uses, would be avoided or minimized through application of standard operating procedures and the design measures identified in the EA under the description of the proposed action.

None of the environmental impacts discussed in the environmental consequences sections of the EA are considered significant.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

If drought conditions warrant the removal of wild horses or burros, the Wild Horse and Burro Standard Operating Procedures (EA Appendix 2) would be used to conduct gather activities and are designed to protect human health and safety.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have minimal affects to public health or safety.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

Based on the environmental analysis of the proposed action, there would be no significant impacts to historic or cultural resources, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas. There are ecologically sensitive areas within the WD that provide habitat for candidate and endangered species. See #9 for discussion. Prime farmlands, park lands and wild and scenic rivers are not present within the District.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

Implementation of the proposed action may be controversial if temporary allotment closures are prescribed for regions of the district experiencing resource degradation. Drought Response Triggers will be used to minimize the impacts of authorized uses and activities on natural resources that are at risk of being adversely affected by drought. In the short-term, the proposed action could adversely impact ranchers who hold BLM grazing permits due to costs incurred to implement Drought Response Actions. However, in the long-term, improved rangeland health conditions would exist for all users/interests in BLM administered lands within the WD.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

There are no known effects that would result from implementation of the proposed action, as analyzed in the EA, that would be considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Implementation of the proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis in the EA (Chapter 4). The cumulative impacts analysis examined all of the other known actions and determined that the Proposed Action would

not have significant cumulative impacts or incrementally contribute to significant cumulative impacts.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The Proposed Action and Alternatives would not affect significant scientific, cultural or historic resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to implementing drought response actions that make up the Proposed Action. Temporary range improvements and gather sites and holding facilities would be inventoried to determine the presence of cultural and or archeological sites that are unclassified, eligible or potentially eligible for the NRHP. Archaeological site inventorying and avoidance measures would ensure that loss or destruction of known significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources does not occur.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The WD initiated informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on December 20, 2012. The USFWS reviewed the proposed action and concurred that the proposed action may affect, but will not adversely affect Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT). USFWS provided a letter of concurrence on April 26, 2013. This satisfies section 7 consultation requirements for the Winnemucca District Drought Response Plan Environmental Assessment. The proposed action will protect T&E habitat.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

Implementation of the proposed action would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

/s/ Gene Seidlitz 5/30/2013

Gene Seidlitz **Date**
District Manager
Winnemucca District